

*Diligent & Accurate*

# DESERT EAGLE

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55th AMU  
maintains  
RC-135 fleet  
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# The power behind

## 55th Aircraft Maintenance Unit keeps

by Senior Airman Aldric Borders  
Editor, 379th AEW Public Affairs

As the sun fades over the desert horizon, the sound of an electric generator providing alternate power to an RC-135 aircraft fills the evening flight line air. A group of Airmen, eager to tend to the needs of the parked plane scurry about it preparing to service and repair everything from engines to hydraulics and electronics, to communications and navigations systems. So what keeps the Airmen of the 55th Aircraft Maintenance Unit ready and motivated day in and day out to support the flying mission of the RC-135 with their maintenance expertise?

Capt. Lance Bartlett, 55th AMU officer in charge said without the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance platform of the RC-135, our nation and coalition partners would have measured difficulty

engaging the enemy.

It's no wonder then why the 55th AMU mission is a 24/7, 365 days a year mission. To support this ongoing tempo, 55th AMU maintainers are not on the Air Expeditionary Force schedule, said Captain Bartlett who is now on his third deployment to Southwest Asia. "We are considered AEF enablers, meaning we do not follow the 120 day, 15 month cycle ... we deploy all the time."

"I understand the importance of the RC-135 and what it brings to the war fighter," said Tech. Sgt. Daniel Green, instrument and flight control craftsman with the 55th AMU. Perhaps this is why Sergeant Green is back for his 18th deployment to Southwest Asia since 1993.

For most people, it may be hard to truly grasp the critical role the 55th AMU maintainers play without first understanding what the RC-135 aircraft brings to the fight.

The RC-135's mission is to detect, identify and geo-locate signals throughout the electromagnetic spectrum; in other words, its mission



Staff Sgt. Kevin Tarwater, electronic warfare systems craftsman with the 55th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, replaces an air cycle machine which is used as one of the primary means to cool the aircraft cabin.

# the plane

## up aircraft off ground, in skies

is to gather critical real-time information needed to fight the enemy, said Captain Bartlett.

Once the information is collected, the RC-135 flight crew forwards it in a variety of formats to a wide range of consumers via Rivet Joint's extensive communications suite, he said. "Consumers such as the Marine Corps, Army and coalition partners then use the obtained information to better fulfill their missions."

Without reliable maintenance on this weapons platform, all these capabilities disappear. Perhaps now the importance and the mission's dependence on the 55th AMU's maintainers is more clear.

"In fulfilling our mission, providing safe, reliable, effective maintenance, we ensure RC-135 aircrews can provide on-scene intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination capabilities," said Captain Bartlett.

Taking it one step further, it should be noted the Airmen of the 55th AMU don't just do their job maintaining a critical weapons system, but do it well.

"For fiscal year 2006, we maintained an 82 percent mission capable rate at this base in Southwest Asia, which is 8 percent higher than the command standard," said Captain Bartlett.

"We fixed more than 17,500 aircraft maintenance discrepancies."

"Our RC-135 aircraft were originally built in the early 1960s. Everyday I am amazed by the accomplishments our maintainers achieve which ultimately allow these national assets to bring arms to bear," he said.

"I've enjoyed deploying," said Staff Sgt. James Parker, 55th AMU aerospace maintenance craftsman. "Here I can strictly focus on my wartime task...fixing and flying airplanes."

Perhaps it is this pride and dedication which makes the RC-135 maintainers eager to keep their aircraft flying.

So the next time an RC-135 and its aircrew take to the skies here and defend freedom, remember it is in part made possible by the everyday, on going application of elbow grease and sweat put into the upkeep of these aircraft by the Airmen of the 55th AMU.



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*-- Capt. Lance Bartlett, 55th Aircraft Maintenance Unit officer in charge*

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